



September 25, 2002

THE

ENVIRONMENTAL

COUNCIL OF

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PAST PRESIDENT

Administrator Christine Todd Whitman
United States Environmental Protection Agency
Ariel Rios Building
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20460

Dear Administrator Whitman:

As leaders of state environmental agencies, we rely on environmental laboratory data in making decisions. It is essential for state and federal agencies, as well as the regulated community, policy makers, environmental or industry groups and public, to have consistently reliable, high quality data from environmental laboratories in order to make sound regulatory and, environmental management decisions. One of the important tools in achieving that goal is laboratory accreditation. To that end, the Environmental Council of the States (ECOS) strongly supports the National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Program (NELAP). The members of ECOS expressed their strong support for this program during our April 2002 meeting in Madison.

This letter reiterates our continued support.

Previously, there was considerable variation among state and federal programs with no national consensus standard. As a result, EPA formed a cooperative association with state and other federal agencies along with the private sector to establish and promote national performance standards for environmental laboratories. This association is known as the National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Conference (NELAC). With EPA's leadership and the active involvement of states and the private sector, NELAC has been an outstanding example of a successful state, federal, and private sector partnership.

Working together, the partners have accomplished the following:

- Twelve programs in eleven states have been approved by EPA's NELAP office as NELAC accrediting authorities.
- These programs have accredited 1248 labs in 45 states and three foreign countries.

Robert E. Roberts
Executive Director

- Other states have programs in development or officially recognize the NELAC standards.
- A survey showed that 40 states intend to pursue NELAP recognition from EPA or to accept NELAC standards
- The Methods Data, Comparability Board under the Advisory Committee on Water Information has recently endorsed NELAC accreditation for all federal and commercial labs performing routine analytical water testing as part of compliance or ambient monitoring programs.
- The Department of Defense has recognized NELAC standards for their laboratories and contractors.

Broad acceptance of this program in a short period of time demonstrates data quality is vitally important to environmental programs. We also recognize EPA provides a valuable service to the states through a leadership role in NELAC. However, continued EPA involvement and support is needed to keep NELAC moving forward at this critical time. Therefore, we urge EPA to:

- Maintain its current commitment to approve state lab accreditation programs;
- Become a model NELAP accrediting authority in order to accredit EPA and state laboratories;
- Acknowledge the need for NELAC standards across all EPA programs. (Although EPA has played a leadership role in NELAC, the safe drinking water program is the only one that has endorsed NELAC accreditation to date.);
- Provide sufficient level of EPA staff for NELAP activities, i.e., recognition of state accreditation programs and accreditation of state laboratories.

A significant reduction in EPA's present level of support and commitment could adversely affect states that have already implemented the NELAC standards as well as states that plan to do so. Reduction in support by EPA could put state laboratory accreditation programs in jeopardy and eventually degrade the quality data available to support environmental decision making.

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EPA has requested that the states and private sector form a nonprofit organization to take over the standards development process and some of the administrative functions that EPA has been performing. This has been accomplished although it is not yet fully functional. We encourage EPA to continue support and participate fully during this critical phase of the transition of responsibilities. The importance of quality laboratory support and defensible results cannot be overstated.

I am looking forward to seeing you in San Antonio for the ECOS Annual Meeting. We appreciate your continued support and advocacy for states' environmental protection programs.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Ron", with a large, stylized loop at the end.

Ronald F. Hammerschmidt, Ph.D.
President, Environmental Council of States

RFH:cah

CC: Linda Fisher, Deputy Administrator, EPA
Sylvia Labie, Chair, NELAC Board of Directors